

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

**Feed the kids, end
the hunger system**

**Campaign for a
Living Wage**

**National punishes the
victims of the jobs crisis**



**The role of the centre-left in the
campaign against asset sales**

**Outcry over torture in Fiji, NZ
hypocrisy**

**Wellington water crisis:
Drought risk driven by capitalism**

**Socialists and sexual violence claims:
An evidence-based approach**

**Tariq Ali:
Hugo Chávez and me**

\$1-\$2

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Fightback 2013 conference

In 2012, Fightback (then the Workers Party) held its annual conference in Wellington and over 120 people attended. Over the weekend comrades discussed topics including tino rangatiratanga and socialism, safer spaces in political organising, industrial struggles, and the student movement.

This year's conference will be held on Queens Birthday Weekend, May 31 to June 1, at Newtown Community Centre in Wellington.

The conference will open with a Friday night panel on the international situation. Saturday's schedule features discussions of youth fightback, industrial perspectives, gender liberation, and building an anti-capitalist movement in Australasia, among other topics. On Sunday June 2 there will be writing workshop for Fightback members and others who want to contribute to our monthly magazine Fightback. Further details to come. For more information call Joel Cosgrove on 022-384-1917

Donations and bequeathments

Fightback is non-profit and relies on financial support from progressive people, supporters and members for all its activities including producing this magazine. To financially support us please deposit to 38-9002-0817250-01 with your initials and surname (or anonymous.) Large and small, regular and one-off donations are all appreciated and listed in Fightback from time to time.

Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

E d i t o r i a l

Welcome to the second issue of *Fightback*, newspaper of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback is a socialist organisation with branches in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch.

Child poverty has continued to feature in headlines this year with at least one in five children living in poverty. Fightback participates in MANA, supporting this party in the struggle for reforms while maintaining the need to build a socialist party. Grant Brookes discusses MANA's Feed The Kids bill, and calls for a collective approach which reinforces that children are part of a wider community and we need to ultimately end poverty in general.

Socialists support struggles for living wages while recognising that "fair wages" are ultimately unachievable under capitalism. Ian Anderson reviews previous struggles for a living wage and covers the current campaign backed by the Service and Food Workers Union.

Full employment is a key to ending poverty. Jared Phillips covers recent attacks on the unemployed and beneficiaries by the National government and the need for socialist solutions.

Fightback is an internationalist organisation, which recognises workers in Aotearoa/NZ must stand with the Pasifika working class. Byron Clark covers a leaked video of police brutality in Fiji, and the hypocrisy of our government condemning this brutality while approving the abuses carried out by its allies in the region.

Socialists must reassess some parts of our understanding of capitalism in the "age

of the geek." Daphne Lawless argues that information workers are part of the working class and discusses the implications of this for socialist transformation in the 21st Century.

Socialists argue that class solutions are required to combat climate change. Ian Anderson covers the impact of climate change on increasing drought risk, and conflicting approaches to water conservation.

Fightback comrades have a range of socialist perspectives on history. Mike Kyriazopoulos revives a piece of lost history, the 1939 condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Finland by Wellington seafarers, and suggests that this offers a glimpse of what socialist politics could look like in Aotearoa/NZ.

Gender liberation, and queer liberation, must be central to any politics of emancipation. Ian Anderson discusses the role of rape myths in supporting sexual violence, and the importance of believing survivors. Anne Russell covers increasing support for marriage rights in the youth wings of all the parliamentary parties, and discusses the limitations of the political beltway in addressing queer concerns.

Hugo Chavez, leader of Venezuela, passed away in March 2013. In an obituary originally published in British paper *The Guardian*, socialist Tariq Ali discusses the legacy of his friend. Chavez was a leader of a social movement that won many gains and inspired struggles internationally.

Finally, the issue concludes with a review of the film No.

In Brief

Youth rates return

Youth pay rates have been re-introduced after being passed in parliament by a majority of one vote. Employers will now be able to pay 16 and 17 year olds 80% of the legal minimum wage. Youth rates can also be paid to 18 and 19 year olds if they are entering the workforce after more than six months on a benefit.

Youth rates were abolished in 2008 following campaigning from Unite union and a successful private members bill from then Green MP Sue Bradford. While the government claims youth rates will reduce youth unemployment, a Department of Labour study shows that in the years following equal pay legislation there were less idle youth - those not in employment education or training - than when youth rates existed.

Rio Tinto may return to Bougainville

Australian mining giant Rio Tinto looks likely to return to Bougainville, an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea, for the first time since the mid-late 1980s. A copper mine on the island was abandoned following a secessionist uprising.

10,000 residents of Bougainville filed a lawsuit against the company, claiming Rio Tinto's Panguna mine operations polluted the island and the company forced native workers to live in "slave like" conditions.

In 2011 the US Appeals court released a decision that allowed Bougainville communities to sue the company for genocide and war crimes because of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals' decision to reverse a lower court's dismissal that was in favour of Rio Tinto.

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Feed the kids



by Grant Brookes

One in five New Zealand children were living in poverty in 2011, says the Ministry of Social Development. Other organisations put the figure at one in four, or 270,000 kids.

The Ministry of Health reports that over 20 percent of households with school-age children do not have enough food. Over 1.8 million food items were distributed in schools last year by KidsCan – just one of a growing number of charities now feeding hungry kids.

In 2011, KidsCan also launched New Zealand's first ever aid programme for children living in this country. In Janu-

ary 2013 the Variety children's charity became the second aid programme, with a new scheme allowing donors to sponsor a local child for \$35 a month.

The facts are stark. The plight of children in Aotearoa today is an indictment of capitalism. The time for government action to "Feed the Kids" is now. MANA Party leader Hone Harawira has a private member's bill before parliament to deliver just that. His Education (Breakfast and Lunch Programmes in Schools) Amendment Bill (or "Feed the Kids Bill", for short) would ensure government-funded meals are available to every child in decile 1 and 2 schools. The first parliamentary vote on the Bill is expected soon.

The Bill is being supported by a wide range of groups, from education and health sector unions, to child welfare advocates, Christian social service agencies and the government's own Children's Commissioner.

With backing from the Labour Party, the Greens, the Maori Party, NZ First and independent MP Brendan Horan, it is currently just one vote short of the numbers needed for it to pass its first reading in parliament.

A public symposium is being held in Tokoroa on April 13 to generate further support. Yet MANA's Feed the Kids Bill also has its critics. Right-wing opponents of the Bill say it's the job of the parents, not the government, to make

sure kids are fed. They say that if the state provides food it lets bad parents off the hook when they spend their money on “booze and smokes” instead.

Some of the harshest critics have been Maori. Yet in the pre-European Maori world, looking after children wasn't just the job of the parents. Every adult had a responsibility to care for all children in their kāinga (village). To a child, everyone above them in the social unit was a matua (parent) or matua tūpuna (grandparent). Men and women described each other's children as “ā mātou tamariki” (the children of us many), as distinct from “ā māua tamariki” (the children of us two).

This shared parenting was based on shared resources. Extended family groups often had their own plot in communal gardens and their own places to fish and hunt. They also laid claim to particular trees. The idea that the mother and father alone are to blame when children go hungry only came to Aotearoa with the introduction of capitalism.

In a repeat of the “enclosures of the commons” which had dispossessed European peasants, colonisation turned shared Māori land, natural resources and taonga into private property. Ownership was quickly transferred to the Crown, wealthy colonists and corporations.

Responsibility for raising children was transferred in turn to the biological parents, especially the mother, so the rest of the community could be put to work for the Pākehā capitalists.

Today, many of those who blame the parents feel genuine concern for the kids. They may also appear to reflect “common sense” about the way the world works. But ultimately they are echoing the mouthpieces of capitalism. Prime minister John Key, for instance, responded to a Salvation Army report which showed record demand for food parcels in 2011 by blaming individuals: “Anyone on a benefit actually has a lifestyle choice. If one budgets properly,

one can pay one's bills... Now some make poor choices and they don't have money left.”

However, the National government is also aware of substantial public support for state-funded meals for all kids in low decile schools. So late last year they advanced their own counter-proposal. They announced a small increase in funding for businesses to deliver a little more, to a select few, through charities. “The government has given money to KidsCan to fund more schools, and the government has worked with other commercial entities like Fonterra to run programmes in schools”, John Key said. Fonterra attracted a lot of publicity for its milk in schools programme, trialled in Northland in 2011 and then rolled out across the country. But Fonterra CEO Theo Spierings had spelled out the cold, capitalist logic behind the idea. It wasn't about caring for kids at all:

“I don't believe in charity”, said Spierings. “This is a business decision – it is really something like advertising and promotion... New Zealand is the largest exporter of dairy products in the world, but at home, we're not drinking as much milk as we used to... Long term we want to have these kids on milk and not on carbonated drinks when they are 20 years old. And when they earn a salary, they go to the supermarket and buy our milk”.

The effect of leaving child welfare to the whims of “business decisions” was felt by the Red Cross in 2011, when Countdown supermarkets withdrew their sponsorship and crippled that organisation's school breakfast programme.

Fonterra is not alone in its ruthless approach to “advertising and promotion” to children. Sanitarium uses its sponsorship of the KickStart Breakfast programme to teach kids “breakfast patterns that can be replicated in the home” by buying their products.

They also use children to subtly re-

inforce the message that their “bad parents” are to blame. They tell kids to “appreciate how good they feel and pass this message on hopefully improving their families' overall health”.

And by refusing to provide breakfasts and lunches on a universal basis to all, the charities favoured by the National government brand the needy kids at school with the stigma of poverty from a young age.

The efforts of all the charities combined, meanwhile, represent a drop in the ocean compared with the level of need. Around 150 schools, and thousands of children, are stuck on the waiting list for help from KidsCan. Many more schools don't bother applying. The greatest outrage, however, is that charities are aligning themselves politically with the National government.

KidsCan proclaims a “vision of a New Zealand where less fortunate children have an equal opportunity to make a positive contribution to society”. Yet KidsCan CEO Julie Chapman is publicly campaigning to discredit the idea of government-funded school meals available to all.

“As the Prime Minister said, not all children in low decile schools need a food programme”, she declared. “KidsCan supports the model of business, community and the government working together... as the most effective and financially prudent approach.”

The problem of New Zealand's hungry children is not down to “bad parents”. As Donna Wynd of the Child Poverty Action Group puts it, “If a few children go hungry in the morning then that suggests a problem within individual families. If hundreds of children go hungry morning after morning then the problem is structural.”

Part of the structural underpinning of hunger is our low wage economy. For it's not just the children of beneficiaries who are effected. Food banks and budg-

Feed the kids/Asset sales

eting agencies report that the greatest increase in people seeking assistance is coming from working families.

So part of the solution requires stronger unions and more militant bargaining, to raise wages across the board. But there is also the need to struggle for a collective approach which supports parents, children, and those impaired or disabled by capitalism.

The clearest commentary on MANA's Feed the Kids Bill has come from the organisation Auckland Action Against Poverty.

"As the Bill recommends, the provision of this food shouldn't be left to charity but should be taxpayer funded", says AAAP spokesperson Sarah Thompson. "This will ensure

greater access country-wide and decrease the dependance on the whims and follies of individual charities and businesses... Every time another charity picks up a 'feed the kids' or 'provide them with shoes' or other such programme, commendable though it may be from an individual point of view, it is another nail in the coffin of the



The role of the centre-left in the campaign against asset sales

by Joel Cosgrove

With the dismissal of the Maori Council's water rights claim to the Supreme Court and the submission of the Anti-Asset Sales petition for a referendum, one phase of the broad campaign against the sale of assets has ended and

the next has begun.

Within the initial campaign against asset sales there were three main approaches; the challenge in the courts, the attempt to build a protest movement, and the attempt to initiate a Citizen's Initiated Referendum on the question. Much faith was placed in the challenge

made by the Maori Council in their appeal to the Supreme Court that the partial privatisation of the government-owned power companies would interfere with the ongoing Treaty of Waitangi settlement process. In the judgment Chief Justice Sian Elias outlined the reasoning of the court. In the reasoning it was claimed that the Crown provided

Feed the kids/Asset sales

welfare state... In addition, in the larger scheme of things, there is an urgent need for decent job creation, a living wage and higher benefit payment rates."

MANA is pursuing struggles like these in parliament, as well. The main job now is to get the Feed the Kids Bill passed. But there are also questions for MANA

leaders.

Their feedthekids.org.nz website says, "The Bill recognises the importance of charities, businesses, and school volunteers currently involved in food in schools programmes".

But it's become clear that these charities and businesses are not wholeheart-

edly committed to child welfare. As the history of Aotearoa suggests, a society which truly shares the care of children must also share ownership and control of land and resources, taking them back from businesses like Fonterra.

reasonable assurances to Maori in regard to water rights, that the Crown had the capacity to provide equivalents and meaning redress, and that the Crown had shown a proven willingness and ability to provide redress.

The relatively quick resolution of the court case has meant that the majority of the news reporting and analysis has more recently been focused on the final moments of the campaign for the CIR.

The CIR campaign has been a relative success. It has achieved what it set out to do, namely to initiate a referendum on the question "Do you support the Government selling up to 49 per cent of Meridian Energy, Mighty River Power, Genesis Power, Solid Energy and Air New Zealand?"

At its core though the referendum campaign has been a passive one, focused around the efforts of the Green and Labour parties to win an organisational arm-wrestle between the two. In a document leaked to National Party activist David Farrar, at the point where 300,000 signatures were collected, the Greens had collected 150,000 signatures, Labour 105,000 and the Unions with 40,000. What this confirms is the political dynamic that became clear over the length of the campaign.

A bureaucratic arm-wrestle

Initially it was the Labour Party who were seen as being the organisation that would lead the campaign with its much vaunted ability to "mobilise the base" by

organising its activist and general membership base when it was needed.

But quite quickly it became clear that the Greens were getting more people out on the streets and were collecting more signatures than Labour. Their structures were stronger and better organised. What is interesting about this is the wider jockeying between the two parties. The Greens are attempting to grow into an equal third party to both National and Labour. A precursor to that situation in the electoral context could well be seen in the degree of national/local organisation, depth, and effectiveness from the political organisation.

So the strong showing of the Greens in this campaign is a major step in the public perception of the Greens as being political equal to the Labour. A noticeable lessening of focus and promotion of the campaign by Labour was matched by a steady increase in the focus and publicity given to the effort by the Greens.

A passive campaign, not an active campaign

What has united both organisations has been their lack of interest or contempt for any effort to build an independent, organic movement of active opposition towards the privatisation agenda of the National government.

The organisation that has focused efforts to oppose the sales on the streets is

Aotearoa Not For Sale which Socialist Aotearoa and the Mana movement helped to initiate. In practice the drive behind organizing protest and direct action has been led by elements of the radical left and in part from people organised/radicalised by the occupy movement.

While Labour and the Greens (as well as the unions and other NGO groups) endorsed the movement, sources inside the Greens have confirmed that the focus within both the Greens and Labour was on freezing out any organising that was not directly controlled by them.

When momentum was large enough not to be ignored, both organizations got on board, but made concerted efforts to undermine or ignore any action outside of the major demonstrations that took place across the country. They preferred to focus on the more passive and controllable task of petition gathering. Specifically with the Greens, there has been an influx of activists and supporters coming on board in reaction to the strong mobilisation campaign, due in part to the hiring of full-time campaigners and the building of a strong structure to incorporate people keen to do something practical. A large effort was placed on subverting radical activity in order to not put the referendum at risk. and directing people towards signature collection as the best way to do something.

We're on the road to

Asset sales

nowhere, come on inside

A wider point to understand is that this attitude of keeping things under party control is something mirrored in other campaigns. Within the campaign for marriage equality, MPs Louisa Wall and Kevin Hague were actively hostile to efforts to build a conference around the issue of same-sex marriage and wider questions, independent of either Labour or the Greens. Party hacks would appear at meetings only when they needed to appear to chide people from acting out of the minimal framework that the Greens and Labour were trying to impose. They argued against discussing anything that went beyond a legal union of two people. They argued that such discussion would be going to far too soon, that it would put the campaign at risk, and it would antagonize regular New Zealanders. They put pressure on activists to maintain a friendly and unchallenging campaign.

The basis of this perspective is to use the hard-work of activists outside of the centre-left but attempt to deny them the ability to speak their politics. This is why a petition-signing campaign is preferable to established parliamentary parties than an active campaign that seeks to build and make arguments for broader social transformation. Within the petition campaign the pressure was on during collections to not talk to people in the street but to maximize petition gathering. With the marriage equality campaign there was an attempt to portray the campaign solely as an attempt to pass a piece of legislation in

parliament and to smother any wider/deeper discussion/campaign around the question of human sexuality and companionship.

Where to next for the asset sales campaign?

Labour have been ambivalent, with leader David Shearer refusing to make a clear stand on the matter of whether a Labour-led government would re-nationalise the assets if elected in 2014. Finance spokesperson David Parker, in a speech to a business audience, talked about what he conceived of as being “strategic assets” which needed to be controlled by the government, electricity generation was described as not being in that category.

There was a similar shade in the Labour campaign against the GST rise to 15%, where they opposed the increase but were clear that they would not repeal the tax increase. Similar again was the Greens inclusion of the tax increase in their shadow budget.

The crux here is that this campaign has been an initial salvo ahead of the upcoming election. Working on the general opposition to asset sales is an easy platform to take pot-shots against the National government.

It is about proving points and mobilising forces. In that respect, it is interesting that during the failed living wage campaign for a referendum on minimum wages 40,000 signatures gathered under the umbrella of the Council Trade of Unions, and in comparison Unite

Union were able to gather 160-200,000 signatures in a 6-month burst. If the Greens outshone Labour in the competing stakes, then the CTU and its affiliated unions were a non-event in the minimum wage campaign.

John Key repeatedly stated that he was refusing to change tack irrespective of the result of the referendum. The framing of the anti-assets sale campaign as being overwhelmingly a question of parliamentary “change” benefits Labour and the Greens. With the apparent end of the legal challenge and with the protest movement running its course, there will be little pressure on the major parliamentary parties to do anything more than campaign for votes. And there is little evidence that a vote for them will actually change anything.

The question for the radical left is one that continues from the questions raised by the Occupy movement, namely the lack of momentum and the lack of an organised presence beyond the fringes of the debates of the day.

While there have been some impressive protests, the last protest in Wellington was attended by barely more than one hundred people. This has allowed the discussion to be one about whether to vote National or whether to vote Labour/Greens. As opposed to this the socialist left needs to emphasise the need to re-nationalise assets. It has to raise the questions about the entire process in which “our” assets are managed in “our” name along the corporate lines of the private sector.

The next National Day of Action is





Workers Party (now Fightback) \$15 minimum wage petition stall at Victoria University

by Ian Anderson

Working people are encouraged to accept the idea they should give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. The problem with this is that within the capitalist system – even in the most developed economies – workers do not receive fair wages. This is because the economic basis of capitalism is that the wage rates (the price of a workers' labour power) paid by employers are less than the amount of value produced by the worker. That is inherent within capitalism, it is how the employing capitalist class makes profit from the working class.

Under genuine socialism the working class majority would control the value it produces instead of that surplus value turned into profits for private capitalists. While socialists are in favour of getting

rid of the capitalist wage system we are also integrated in collective organisation around immediate demands for improved wages. The struggle for improved wages is not just morally correct. It leads to socialist and revolutionary conclusions at junctures where capitalism can't meet the wage needs and demands of the masses of workers. So while we can't win a "fair wage" under capitalism, socialists must support campaigns for improved wages and should endeavour to be at the forefront. Recent 'Living Wage' campaigns have sought to improve wages for the growing working poor in Aotearoa.

Service-sector unions have a key role to play in campaigns for living wages, as the service sector is particularly affected by casualisation and declining real wages. In recent years, Unite (a relatively newer union for underemployed workers, with its base in the fast food sector)

and the Service and Food Workers Union (a more established hospitality union, affiliated to the Labour Party) have run nationwide campaigns for a living wage.

Unite: SuperSizeMyPay and \$15 an hour living wage

From 2005, Unite ran a campaign under the slogan SuperSizeMyPay. Organisations like Radical Youth and Workers Charter, as well as some other community and union figures supported the campaign. Along with fighting and defeating youth rates, Unite campaigned for a \$12 minimum wage and secure hours of work. The union used strike actions and political pressure. At the height of the campaign the Labour-led government announced that a \$12 minimum wage would not be possible until 2012. Unite and its supporters then

Living wage campaign

fought under the slogan “2008 is far too late.” Despite the fact that the campaign was demanding an immediate increase to \$12 per hour, it is nevertheless true that the movement was instrumental in pressuring the Labour-led government to implement a set of annual minimum wage increases which resulted in a \$12 minimum wage being obtained in 2008.

In June 2009, Unite Union launched a new Living Wage campaign. This campaign was a petition for a Citizens Initiated Referendum, on the question: “Should the adult minimum wage be raised in steps over the next three years, starting with an immediate rise to \$15 per hour, until it reaches 66% of the average total hourly earnings as defined in the Quarterly Employment Survey?” By demanding that minimum wages be tied to the average wage, this demand had a shelf life beyond the new minimum rate for which it was immediately calling.

Fightback (then Workers Party) comrades participated in the campaign; running community stalls, events, and distributing petitions in workplaces. Fightback members argued that the petition should be used as a tool to organise workplaces and communities, and supported the idea of starting a nationwide conversation about wages. The campaign also had the advantage of a measurable goal (successfully petitioning 10% of registered voters to initiate a referendum) in contrast to vague slogans like “Fairness at Work” the success or failure of which cannot be measured.

Unite’s campaign took to the streets to make its demands visible. In early 2010, protests in Whangarei, Auckland Central, Waitakare, Hamilton, Whanganui, Palmerston North, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin targeted National MPs. Joe Carolan, national organiser of the campaign, appeared on national television confronting Prime Minister John Key.

However, this campaign failed to collect the 300,000 signatures needed for a Citizens-Initiated Referendum. Individual delegates and organisers from some

of the larger unions actively supported the campaign. The NDU (now FIRST Union) presented the petition at major stop-work meetings and delegates training events. However the campaign did not draw in significant practical support from the wider official union movement. Those who participated got 210,000 signatories. Ultimately though, Unite was unable to draw together a strong enough coalition to get enough signatories to force a referendum.

Inflation and real wages

For its 2011 election campaign, Labour adopted the “\$15 an hour” slogan, notably without the demand for minimum wages to be tied to the average wage. By ignoring inflation and waiting two years to pick up the slogan, Labour defanged the original demand, as they had done prior to 2008.

Real wages have declined 25% over the last 30 years, under Labour and National governments. The term “real wages” describes the relative growth or decline of wages measured against to the price of commodities such as food. Therefore real wage measurements are useful for understanding changes in living standards.

Demands at particular workplaces may be based on market conditions, industry standards, and so forth. However, at a different level socialists support broad wage reforms that reflect the impact of rising prices.

2012-2013: Living Wage Campaign Aotearoa/NZ

In 2012 a new Living Wage Campaign Aotearoa/NZ was launched. The campaign’s key backer is the Service and Food Workers Union. This campaign does not have a particular numerical demand. It calls for a living wage relative to conditions. However a report by the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit, commissioned by the Living Wage campaign, recommended a living wage of \$18.40/hr, approximately two-thirds

of the average wage.

This campaign has deliberately sought a broad coalition, and has been endorsed by a range of groups – including the Child Poverty Action Group, faith organisations, and We Are the University (WATU). The Living Wage Campaign has earned coverage in national newspapers, including a glowing editorial by progressive columnist Tapu Misa.

In mid-March 2013, tofu and soy product manufacturer Tonzu was the first employer to endorse the living wage principle of the campaign, agreeing to pay their six factory workers at least \$18.40/hr within a year. This will improve conditions for the six workers onsite. However, the overwhelming majority of workers cannot rely on the good will of employers. Previous living wage campaigns have succeeded due to militant action in workplaces and communities. The bulk of capitalists will only accept these demands by coercion. That coercion can take the form of pressure from organised workers and communities. It can also take the form of pressure from governments which are themselves pressured by the working class.

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek has argued that the worst slave-owners were the ones who were kind to their slaves. By forming friendlier relationships with slaves they prolonged the system of slavery. Reformists, as well as some far-sighted capitalists, argue that higher wages are a stimulus for the economy. While that may be true, increased demand will not resolve the inherent problems of capitalism, including its cyclical boom-bust nature. Revolutionary socialists argue that in the battle for higher wages, we must prepare the broader struggle for a democratically planned economy. The working class cannot rely on partnership with employers.

National punishes the victims of the jobs crisis: Socialist solutions desperately needed



Thousands lined up for 150 jobs in South Auckland, some were line for over seven hours.

This article by Jared Phillips, Fightback member, was originally published by the Socialist Party of Australia.

Workers in Aotearoa/NZ are applying in large numbers for scarce jobs, large-scale redundancies are becoming more frequent, record numbers of people are leaving the country, and the government is putting tougher tests on welfare recipients.

In a nutshell there are not enough jobs to go around and the National Party led government is placing the burden on ordinary people who were in no way responsible for this crisis.

At the end of the third quarter of 2012 the rate of unemployment was at 7.3% which is the highest rate recorded in Aotearoa/NZ since 1991. The number of officially unemployed had risen by 13,000 on the previous quarter. Youth unemployment was disproportionately high at 17.1%.

Last month 1600 people applied for 80 positions at a new supermarket in Blenheim, a town in the South Island. This is

not uncommon. In Christchurch 1000 people applied for 170 new supermarket jobs last September. Also last year, a supermarket was still under construction in the city of Palmerston North when 600 people gave in applications at other locations of the supermarket chain. A manager reported that job applications were going in "before we even turned the dirt at the new store". This illustrates that workers in Aotearoa/NZ are job-starved and desperate for work.

Wave of redundancies

The core productive sectors of the economy have been through a prolonged downsizing since privatisation and other neo-liberal policies were introduced in the 1980s but there has been a new spike in redundancies as result of the recent economic crisis.

Already in 2013 large scale redundancies have been carried out with NZ Post announcing 100 lay-offs, Mainzeal construction (one of the larger construction firms in NZ) going bankrupt leaving at least 200 workers redundant, Contact Energy announcing its intention to

strip-back its 1100 workforce by 10%, Summit Wool Spinners announcing 192 redundancies and Norske Skog announcing 110 redundancies at Tasman Pulp and Paper.

These redundancies follow on from redundancies last year at KiwiRail, Solid Energy, and New Zealand Aluminium Smelters.

Statistics New Zealand has reported that there has been a decline of 17,000 jobs in manufacturing from 257,000 at the end of 2011 to 240,000 at the end of 2012.

Migration to Australia

The jobs crisis is made even more apparent by rising migration to Australia which has also reached record levels. In 2012 alone a massive 53,700 people left Aotearoa/NZ in search of better employment and income opportunities in Australia. This is a rate of almost 5000 per month leaving for Australia.

In 2012 the number of Aotearoa/NZ citizens who migrated permanently to another country was up 30,000 on the number that migrated in 2002. This

Jobs crisis

masks the true extent of the jobs crisis as the number of people leaving the country is not recorded in the unemployment figures.

National's 'Future Focus'

At the same time as unemployment is being forced onto an increasing share of the population the National-led government has continued to make life more difficult for those without work.

In 2011 the National Party announced it had made – what were in effect – over \$17 million in cuts to unemployment benefits over the previous year. It did so by introducing its Future Focus policy package which required unemployment benefit recipients to reapply for their benefits annually. This led to 5000 people not reapplying and the cancellation of 9200 benefits over the same period.

The policy requiring annual reapplication was also pushed on to sickness beneficiaries and led to the cancellation of 900 sickness benefits. In the cases of both unemployed and sickness beneficiaries there was no increase in employment to match the cancelled benefits, meaning that the cuts directly intensified hardship.

Future Focus also had a strong emphasis on negatively targeting sole parents – mostly women – as it sought to curb Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) entitlements. Specifically DPB recipients now have their benefits cancelled for failure to look for part-time work when a child reaches the age of six.

National announced that in the first phase of its so-called welfare reform it expanded work testing from 25% of beneficiaries to 36%. At the same time those receiving benefits fell from 345,000 to 328,000, and – as already pointed out – there was no corresponding job growth.

Women and youth face additional discrimination

Last year the government went into a further phase of attacking the civil liberties of unemployed women and youth in particular. Women on benefits

and daughters of women on benefits (between the age of 16 and 19) have been targeted by a scheme which provides grants for long-acting reversible contraceptives.

Socialists agree with the provision of free contraception for all. However, we resolutely oppose the idea that any particular section of society should be targeted and impliedly labelled by the state as being less fit for reproduction.

As anti-poverty campaigners have pointed out, if the government wanted to fulfil social obligations and improve access to contraception then the already existing family planning centres would have received additional funding. On the contrary it is not ruled out that some family planning centres, which provide universal free or subsidised contraception, will lose funding as District Health Boards look to make cuts.

Since 2012 unemployed youth have been channelled through a new Youth Service which serves the purpose of tightening the obligations to be met by unemployed youth if they are to continue receiving a benefit. Youth Service manages individual weekly entitlements by forwarding money directly to landlords and power companies, and any left-over balances are credited to cards that can only be used on a limited range of items, such as food at supermarkets. Many of these measures mimic the discriminatory laws that have been used against Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory of Australia.

That the government will go to such surreal lengths to curb youth welfare entitlements instead of creating socially useful jobs for young people on a planned basis is indicative of the depth of the unemployment problem. It also shows that capitalism as a system is incapable of offering any real solutions.

Criminalising the unemployed

One controversial policy implemented last year prescribes that a person's benefit can be cut if he or she has obligations to look for work but fails to apply

for jobs which have drug testing in the recruitment process. People with drug-related issues need social and medical help rather than being forced further into poverty.

Another is that the Ministry of Social Development now has the power to cut the benefit of any person who has an outstanding warrant for arrest and who has not presented to police within a week of receiving notice from Work and Income New Zealand.

Overall these policies have the socially destructive effect of portraying all unemployed people as being criminal or having drug issues. These policies also hurt the families and particularly the children of the people in question.

The socialist alternative

The National Party led government's only solution for reinvigorating economic growth in Aotearoa/NZ is to punish the victims of this jobs crisis. Public spending cuts, public asset sales and wage restraint goes side by side with tax cuts to the rich. As has been seen in Europe, far from helping, these measures have only made the crisis deeper. Socialists argue that everyone should have the right to work. We fight for a system that provides jobs to all those who can work and a living wage to those who can't. Full employment could be achieved by shortening the working week, without a loss in pay, and sharing out the work.

Thousands more jobs could be created by initiating a massive public works program that focused on building the things that society needs like more housing and public transport and an expansion of public health, and education.

At the end of the day it is the profit driven system of capitalism that creates unemployment. Side by side with fighting against redundancies, for more jobs and for decent welfare, trade unions, progressive community groups and socialists need to fight for a system that prioritises people's needs.



Outcry over torture in Fiji, NZ hypocrisy

by Byron Clark

On March 15 protests took place in Auckland and Wellington against police brutality and torture in Fiji. While allegations of torture have cropped up in Fiji since the coup that put Bainimarama in power, the latest outcry follows the leaking of video depicting two handcuffed men being beaten by plain clothes police.

An editorial in the Fiji Times described the video as “[D]isturbing and shocking. It is gross, painful and will leave an indelible impression on all those who have witnessed it.” The father of one of the victims, Vueti Sanawa, a retired military officer said that in all his life as a soldier in the Middle East, he had never come across any torture such as that he witnessed of his son.

Amnesty International has called for an independent investigation, something Fiji’s ministry of information has

promised. Justice seems unlikely though when Bainimarama has stated “I will stick by my men, by the police officers or anyone else that might be named in this investigation. We cannot discard them just because they’ve done their duty in looking after the security of this nation and making sure we sleep peacefully at night”

New Zealand political parties across the spectrum have been quick to join the condemnation of Fiji, a motion in parliament to do so was passed without dissent. While in and of its self this is a positive thing, it demonstrates the hypocrisy of many New Zealand politicians. When it comes to police brutality happening in neighbouring countries, latest Corruption and Crime Commission figures in Australia show that police brutality is increasing, up from 175 complaints in 2007 to of 201 complaints in 2012.

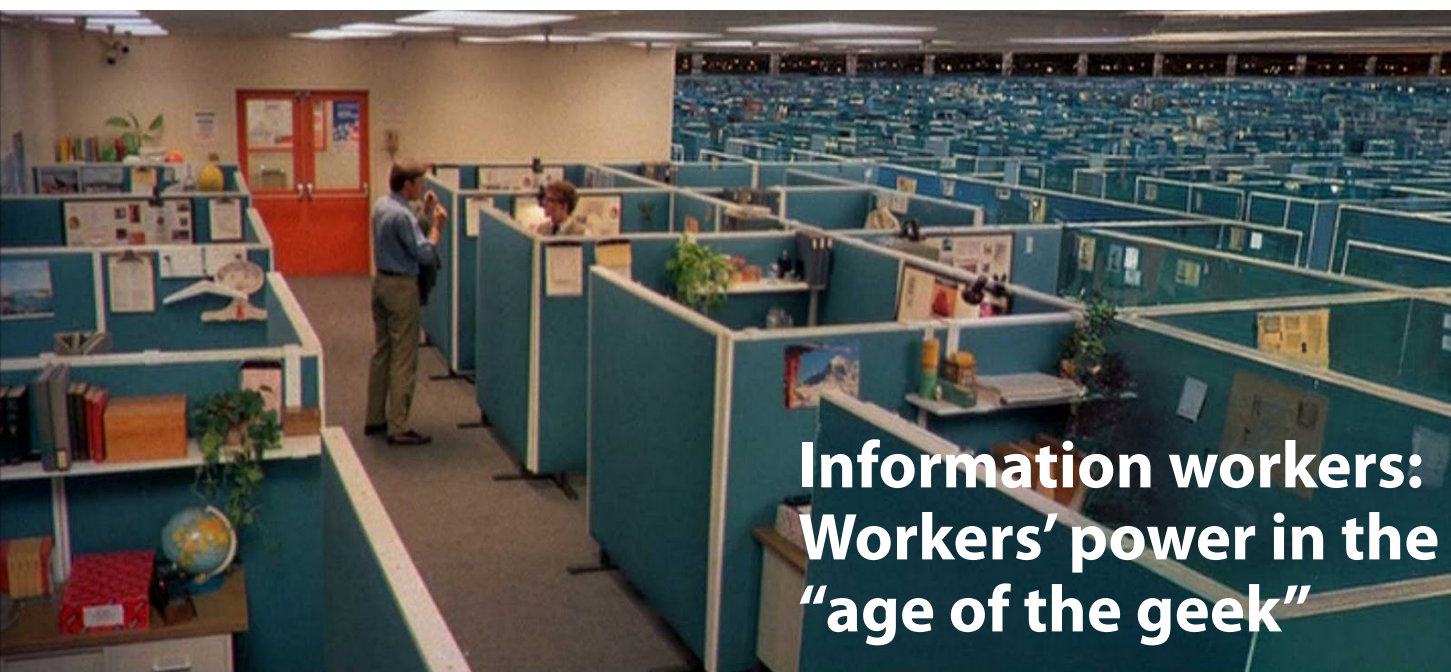
Police brutality in Australia is often directed at indigenous communities. Re-

cently brutality at Sydney Mardi Gras drew parallel community protests in Sydney and Wellington (Aotearoa/NZ).

Amnesty International has noted another area where abuses in Australia are covertly tolerated by the government of Aotearoa/NZ, specifically the deal struck on asylum seekers;

“Amnesty International thinks that this move shows that another country is down the wrong path of refugee policy, and is taking these steps to deter refugees from seeking protection, rather than living up to its obligations under the Refugee Convention.” Amnesty International spokesperson Alex Paliaro told media.

Parliamentary censure of abuses is applied selectively, and has more to do with New Zealand’s imperialist interests – be it trade or military alliances – than it does with “human rights.”



Information workers: Workers' power in the "age of the geek"

by Daphne Lawless

As Alec Hardison says on the hit TV show *Leverage*: "it's the age of the geek, baby". Information technology workers are increasingly important and increasingly recognizing their own importance. Here's why.

What makes Marxism different from other schools of thought which seek to understand and to change the world is that it precisely identifies who the agent of that change will be. The working class – to use the old-fashioned term, the "proletariat" – are the section of society who must work for wages and salaries to survive, who are the most exploited part of society, but at the same time potentially the most powerful.

This is because, in the words of the old union song: "Without their brains and muscle, not a single wheel would turn". Profit, the life-blood of the system, is made by their work. If they withdraw that work, if they seize the means of production and turn them to production for use instead of profit, then the whole basis of the world system could be turned upside down.

But who are the working class in a developed 21st century country like Aotearoa/New Zealand? Some would

say that the "working class" as Marx described it no longer exists, or at least, it only exists in places where mass-production manufacturing is still the centre of the economy, like China or other growing Asian economies. It is hard to see how casualised service workers or cleaners on their own could bring the machine to a standstill.

One section of working people in countries like ours increasingly fit the description of "agents of change", are exploited by the system, and have the power to pull the plug on the whole thing.

IT – information technology, computers, internet, and so forth – made globalisation possible. Starting in the 1960s with the first TV satellite, globalised instant communication was now possible. As the capital markets of the Western world were deregulated in the 1970s, the growth of computer technology now meant it was possible to shift money across the world in the blink of an eye.

It also meant that "outsourcing" – decoupling production from administration and design, and sending mass production to low-wage countries – was also possible, now that the boss could keep instant tabs on what was happening across the ocean in China or Korea. And when it became possible, it became

necessary to take on the technology to keep ahead.

Finally, the explosion of popularity of the Internet in the mid-90s made IT workers not only important, but rock stars. Wild fantasies went around that the "dot-com boom" meant a new era of capitalism, with no more booms and busts, the business cycle all smoothed out by instantaneous communication. Plus, online sales meant a true globalisation of consumption. People in New Zealand with an internet connection and a credit card could suddenly order goods directly from other countries.

All this meant that information technology was the new god of capitalist production, and IT workers were its high priests. Fifteen years ago, IT workers in New Zealand could write their own ticket. Starting salaries of \$60,000 fresh out of university weren't unknown. That isn't even to mention the "start-ups" which went from two geeks in a garage to multi-millionaire status in a couple of years.

IT workers certainly didn't look like exploited proletarians. They were getting paid big money, and were able to dictate their terms of employment. Many firms changed their corporate culture so as to attract and retain IT workers who weren't into turning up to work on time

or wearing a suit. Quite a far cry from fast-food workers being refused a break in a ten-hour shift.

But then something happened to the IT industry. *Proletarianisation* is when a previously privileged profession – the classic examples are teachers and nurses – start to lose their privileges when the money gets tight. Or maybe too many new workers are being trained in their field, attracted by those privileges, and the bosses get their chance to cut back on their existing employee's perks and salaries.

During the dot-com boom, IT workers were encouraged to see themselves as partners with the capitalists who hired them. They were often paid in “stock options” – the right to buy shares in their company at a discount price – which, if the company went big, would make them millionaires. But of course, if the company flopped, they got nothing.

And of course, the “dot-coms” flopped in large numbers in 2000–2001. IT work started to seem like a lot of other occupations. In some fields, like videogame design, new programmers were prepared to work for very low wages or even for free, just for the privilege of being involved in such a “cool” industry.

Worse, the industry became *deskilled*. As software became more complex and more user-friendly, the amount of specialised knowledge needed to programme or operate a computer became less. The easier it became to work the devices, the less privileged IT work became – and so the greater competition for contracts or jobs.

We're not quite in a position where IT has become a sweatshop industry. IT is still skilled labour and IT workers retain privileges. But it's increasingly just another occupation. Young kids fresh out of school often have coding skills which rival IT workers with a decade's experience.

IT work is becoming proletarianised in the sense that IT workers are subject to the same kinds of competition and

pressure from the boss as other kinds of workers. But the other side of the coin is the *power* of the proletarian class. And although IT workers may not have quite so much privilege any more, they have power.

The internet and computers are now so vital to almost every firm, large and small, that for a company's IT to melt down means disaster. The kind of people who can salvage a disk crash or repel a hacker's attack on a firm's website are still vital. So increasingly, skilled workers in IT are flexing their muscle in order to bring about change in their world.

Usually it's not directed at the boss. The idea of workers' organisation in the sense of unions has, over the decades, gotten through to nurses and even doctors. It has not got through to IT workers yet. IT culture tends to be individualistic to the point of anarchism, and the idea of disciplined collective action of the kind needed to win an industrial dispute is still quite far-fetched.

But information workers are making their presence felt in political activism. Politicians and the media have long had a cozy deal – they promote the ideas of the corporate bosses, protect their secrets, and are rewarded with a cut of the profits. Other ideas are simply pushed out of the mainstream.

However, the flow of information is the central concept of in IT work. The “cyber-libertarian” James Gilmore puts it this way: “the Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it”.

The phenomenon of cyberactivism – under the banner of “Anonymous” or elsewhere – shows how crucial the role of information workers in today's society is. And it's not just as basic as being able to hack into a government mainframe, extract its secrets and pass them on to Wikileaks.

Increasingly media and politicians have to use social media to get their point across. But skilled information workers can put together a counter-narrative – or counter-memes – which, if properly

designed, can spread like wildfire and drown out the official message.

The Arab Spring should show us all how important information workers are. They are the ones who make sure that a cellphone video of a protest in Cairo can be seen around the world within minutes. In 2009, when the Iranian government shut down communications out of the country during the Green Movement uprising, Anonymous stepped in to ensure that Iranian dissidents could still get their message out.

Information workers are getting organised. Their politics are not the same as other groups of workers, because the way they live and the way they make their living means that collectivist ideas don't make sense. But they are exploited by their bosses too. They have to fear for their jobs, or hang onto a precarious freelance lifestyle. And they can read the news and understand that the system where wages stay stagnant and benefits are cut so the mega-rich can keep doubling their money is increasingly obscene.

The work of “geeks” is vital for keeping the bosses in charge – not only in organising and controlling their employees, but in keeping the airwaves and the video-screens full of the establishment's ideas and their messages. A workers' movement which aims to change the world and take power for working people will have to build alliances with the workers at the heart of the machine which insinuates brand names and political messages into our very minds. The traditional workers' movement and the “self-organisation of computer nerds” have to start talking.

Water crisis

Wellington water crisis: Drought risk driven by capitalism

Writers for Fightback

In mid-March 2013, Wellington City Council announced a water crisis. Nigel Wilson, chair of the region's committee in charge of water supply, stated that Wellington, Porirua and the Hutt Valley had only 20 days of water left. From March 16, the city announced a ban on outdoor water use by residents and imposed a \$20,000 fine for violations. At the same time commercial users faced no restrictions.

This follows a regular pattern whereby the council focuses on curbing residential water usage, whether through attempts at residential metering or through an outright ban as in this case. By implication, the council blames residents for any water shortages. Proportionally, industrial users such as Preston's Meatworks are the biggest users.

"Non-commercial" and domestic usage
The council generally estimates "non-commercial" usage at around 350 litres per person per day, around half of usage overall. However, "non-commercial" usage includes council usage, theft, and leaks. Leaks are unaccounted in bulk purchases; in fact around 20% of water in Wellington is unaccounted, compared to a national average of about 10-15%. Accurate estimates for domestic con-

sumption can be found not in the council figures, but in the nationwide Quality of Life reports. The most recent Quality of Life Report produced in 2007 found Wellington domestic consumption between 2001 and 2007 to be on average 170 litres per person per day, on par with other cities. This is less than half of the Wellington City Council's estimates for "non-commercial" use.

By conflating various uses and misuses under "non-commercial," this manipulation of statistics gives the misleading impression that residents consume around half of Wellington's water.

Climate change and drought

The North Island is suffering from its worst drought in 70 years. At the time of writing Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay are officially in drought, with more likely to follow.

In an opinion piece for South Island paper *The Press*, Physical Geography and Earth Sciences Professor James Renwick suggests that the risk of drought in Aotearoa/NZ is on the rise. Renwick reports that rising global temperatures, combined with lower soil moisture, could double the risk of drought by the end of the century.

Although Renwick does not explicitly state this, sticking strictly to his geographical field, it's well-established that

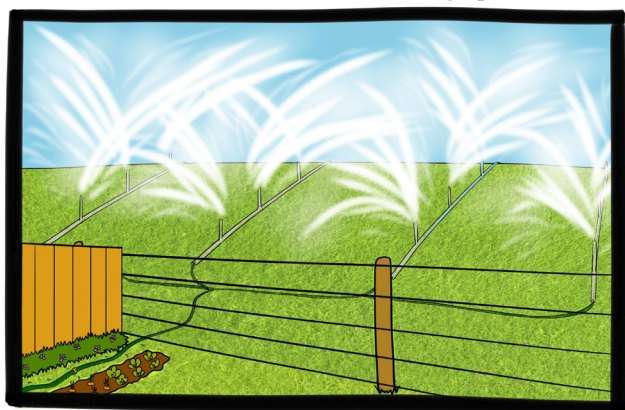
greenhouse gas emissions are driving global warming. The underlying causes of increasing drought risk are not residential water use, or even commercial water use, but global warming driven by capitalist industry. Agriculture makes up the bulk of our emissions in Aotearoa/NZ; in a grim irony, it's also the sector most affected by drought.

Solutions: Eco-socialism or barbarism

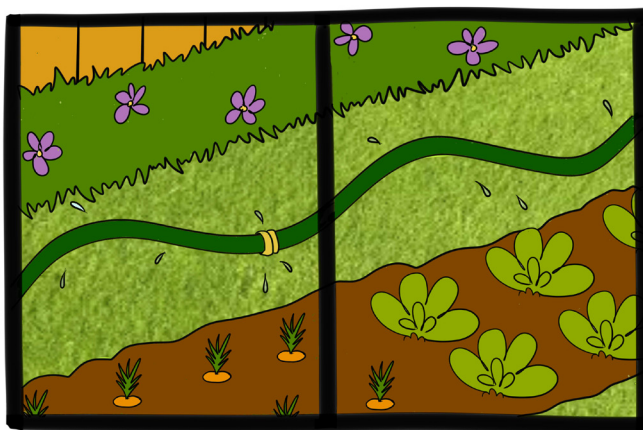
Discussion of water conservation often focuses on showers, taps, toilets, and other residential use. Wellington City Council has previously proposed residential water meters, coupled with a user-pays system. User pays for residential water has triggered community resistance in Auckland and elsewhere, because it restricts access to water based on income. Fightback opposes 'conservation' efforts which punish poor families and residents.

Even focusing solely on non-commercial usage, a democratically planned socialist approach could meet immediate needs and curb wastage. Installing rainwater tanks in houses can conserve up to 40% of potable water, without significantly limiting real consumption. Fixing pipe leaks could save up to 20% of usage. Investing in these options is not profitable like user-pays, but would be more effective for conservation.

There are short-term options available



Cat Kane '13



for conserving water, both residential and commercial. However, the underlying causes of increasing drought risk are

agricultural, industrial, and economic. Ultimately, to end ecologically destructive practices, we must organise to take

democratic control.

Wellington seafarers on the invasion of Finland, 1939

Fightback is a Marxist organisation that houses a range of anti-Stalinist historical perspectives. In this article Mike Kyriazopoulos argues for a third camp position on 20th Century history, which can be summed up as "neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism."

Readers with a knowledge of the history of Trotskyism will know that the USSR's invasion of Finland on 30 November 1939 marked a turning point for the movement. It triggered a fierce debate, and eventually a split among the US Trotskyists. What is less well known is that a contemporary parallel development emerged among the Wellington seafarers.

The Evening Post of December 7, 1939 reproduced the full text of a long resolution passed by a stop-work meeting of the Federated Seamen's Union which expressed its "profound sympathy with the people of Finland now suffering under a brutal aggression in pursuance of the policies of the Stalin - Hitler partnership."

The meeting conveyed its "admiration of their splendid fight against overwhelming odds in defence of their homes, of the conditions established in their country, and of their national culture. It notes that the Labour and Trade Union movements in Finland and all the surrounding Scandinavian countries have expressed their solidarity with the Finnish people and their detestation of the present unprovoked aggression.

"This meeting remembers the conditions under which the Soviet

Government was first established in 1917 under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, and how it expressly repudiated the kind of aggression that Stalin and the present Russian dictatorship have launched. Marx and Engels, the founders of scientific socialism, vigorously opposed aggression against small nations. In 1917 the new Soviet Government appealed for, and secured, the support of workers throughout the world, largely because it stood for the freeing of small nations from their oppressors and for the determination of hostilities without annexations and without indemnities. The original Constitution of the Soviet Union expressly stated that it was 'a voluntary union of equal peoples' and that each constituent republic enjoyed 'the right of freely withdrawing.' Further, the Soviet Government at the time gave practical proof of its sincerity by surrendering the rights it enjoyed over China and Persia under the former Tsarist treaties and by freely granting its independence to the Finland that Stalin is now endeavouring to crush."

The president of the Seaman's Union, Fintan Patrick Walsh, wrote to Trotsky in Mexico on 3 January 1940 enclosing a copy of the resolution. Walsh stated, "Although we down under are more or less outside the world affairs we nevertheless take a keen and live interest on matters effecting [sic] the international working class."

Trotsky replied on 19 February, "Thank you cordially for your warm letter of

solidarity. I enjoyed it the more that, in this period of terrible chauvinistic pressure in almost all the countries of the world, sincere and consistent socialist voices are rather an exception."

Five months later Trotsky was murdered by one of Stalin's agents. Walsh, who had cut his teeth as a militant in the IWW in the US during the early 20th-century, was rapidly moving rightwards. By 1951, he would sell out the wharves in their epic battle against the government.

What makes the Wellington seafarers' resolution so significant is that, in my view, they had a clearer perspective than the great revolutionaries Trotsky and James P Cannon, who refused to condemn the invasion of Finland in their intra-Trotskyist polemics. (Although in his public writings, Trotsky was far more critical of the USSR's invasion.)

Walsh was already an irredeemable bureaucrat in 1939. He was never likely to play a progressive role in politics, and his correspondence with Trotsky is more of a historical curiosity than anything else. What is important, though, is that the resolution was moved, discussed and voted for at a meeting of rank and file workers at a crucial point in history. As such, the record of the seafarers' position stands as a tantalising glimpse of the "Third Camp" politics that might have been in Aotearoa.

Sources:

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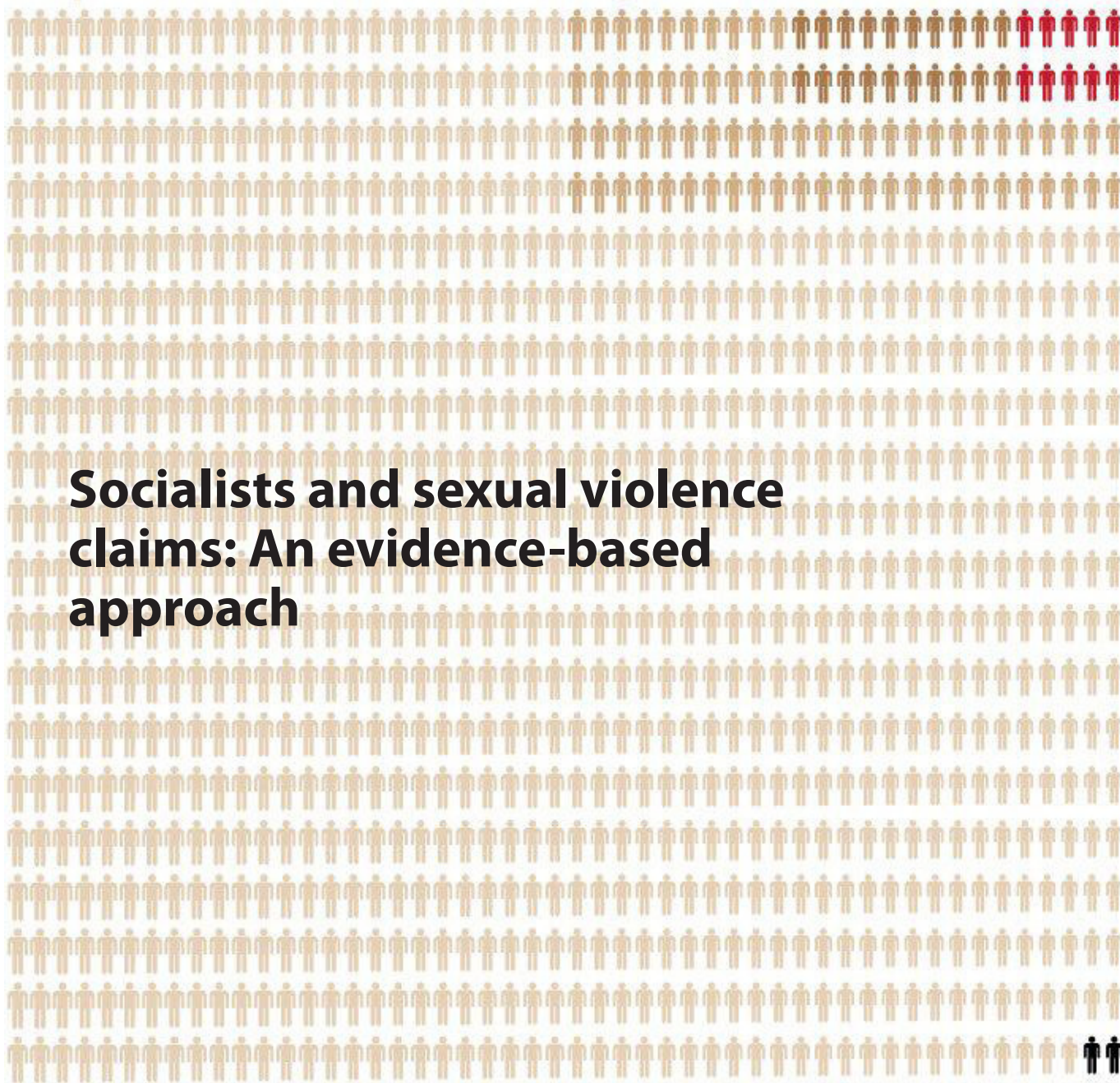
Sexual violence

Rapists

Reported

Faced Trial

Jailed



The Enliven Project <http://theenlivenproject.com/the-truth-about-false-accusation/> Design by Paul Pierson **Falsely Accused**

by Ian Anderson

On March 12th 2013, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the UK split, over a crisis triggered when the Central Committee defended a member accused of rape. The Disputes Committee, comprised of colleagues and friends of the accused, had found the case “not proven.” While leading members of the SWP challenged this decision, a Special Conference in March reaffirmed it,

leading to around 100 members leaving and forming a new International Socialist Network (<http://tinyurl.com/bafj5ya>).

This is not an isolated case. In recent years, rape allegations against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange have divided progressives. Whenever nominally progressive men are accused of sexual violence, it reveals divisions in the groups and communities they’re a part of.

When men are accused of rape, “where’s the evidence?” is a common refrain – as

seen in the SWP Disputes Committee verdict of “not proven.” But what evidence or proof should we look for? Forensic, psychological, case-by-case? What is an evidence-based approach to rape and sexual violence?

Our method: From general to particular

Marxists (or historical materialists) proceed from the general to the particular; from knowledge of how society

Sexual violence/Marriage equality

as a whole operates, to a particular problem. We do not ask each worker to prove they are being exploited, because we know how work is organised under capitalism, how profit is taken from the mass of workers. While we seek information on the specifics of a workplace situation, we do that on the basis of a broader analysis. Similarly, our approach must proceed from knowledge about how gender oppression works.

In order to approach accusations of sexual violence, we must start from the general. We start from analysis of society, how it produces sexual violence, and crucially where we are located in this process. Rather than starting with each case, we should proceed from a general understanding of sexual violence, to particular cases.

Rape culture

In early January 2013, an infographic circulated online concerning rape accusations (Fig 1). Produced by US sexual violence campaign the Enliven Project, the graphic draws on data from the National Crime Victimization Survey. This graphic implies that most rape claims go unreported, that very few rapists are jailed, and that false accusations are incredibly rare – about 2%.

An article in Slate (<http://tinyurl.com/ahn87sm>) notes some inaccuracies in the graphic, while agreeing with the core arguments. The graphic actually overestimates false accusations. In a

report by the National Centre for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women, researchers note that “a perpetrator who is either a stranger or a vaguely described acquaintance” is one realistic indicator of a false report. Therefore false accusations – where a specific perpetrator is named – are even rarer than false reports in general.

When women report rape, they face serious consequences. If their case goes to court, they face a re-traumatising process in which they are often blamed for the attack. The SWP Disputes Committee reproduced this shaming in its internal trial process, asking the survivor about her drinking habits.

This is called “rape culture.” Rape culture blames survivors, rather than perpetrators. Rape culture is part of a system which doubly oppresses women; which assumes women’s consent, and relies on women’s unpaid labour (<http://tinyurl.com/b6mkzqwz>). Women’s oppression and class society are inextricably linked, and you cannot fight one without the other.

Confronted with these realities, SWP Central Committee hacks accuse members of bringing in an alien ideology, “creeping feminism.” However, historical materialist approaches cannot be so ideologically narrow. We draw on the sciences, on climatology and earth sciences, even on pro-capitalist economics. We cannot simply reject observations because they do not fit our current understanding, or come from people we

otherwise disagree with.

Socialists and sexual violence claims

Socialists cannot start by questioning the testimony of the oppressed; we understand it in the context of a wider system that demands their silence. An evidence-based, historical materialist approach to sexual violence starts not by questioning the words of survivors, but by questioning the assumption that survivors are lying, when false accusations make up less than 2% of cases.

The SWP has argued for listening to survivors in the past. An article in their paper Socialist Worker argued that Julian Assange should face his charges (<http://tinyurl.com/a7b8gh2>). Notably, the author of that article resigned when the SWP Central Committee protected the accused in their own ranks (<http://tinyurl.com/axh4ln8>). Ultimately, the Central Committee prioritised self-preservation over anti-sexist principles.

Rape culture affects every group in class society; socialists, anarchists, students, workers. Fightback is committed to building a revolutionary socialist organisation in Aotearoa/NZ. Rather than pretending we are immune from the problems of class society, we must build structures that counter oppressive ideology. This involves democratic accountability, educating cadre on the challenges of women’s liberation, and listening to survivors.

Youth representatives come out to support marriage equality

This report by Anne Russell was originally printed on Scoop.co.nz.

Representatives from the youth wings of seven political parties held a press conference outside Parliament today

to promote the Marriage Equality Bill. These included: Shaun Wallis of Young Nationals, Kieran Meredith of Young Labour, Izzy Lomax of Young Greens, Curwen Rolinson of NZ First Youth, Teanonui McKenzie of the Young Maori

Party, MANA spokesperson Ian Anderson, and Amy Richardson of ACT on Campus. The eighth representative, Damain Light of United Future, was unable to attend due to the fog in Wellington. The conference was introduced

Marriage equality

by Conrad Reyners, representing the Marriage Equality campaign. Various politicians were also present, including Jan Logie, Grant Robertson and Mary-an Street. Louisa Wall and Tau Henare were unable to attend, the former due to her commitments to her electorate in Auckland.

Although there is undoubtedly some disagreement within each youth wing of Parliament, it is still rare for youth representatives to attain this level of consensus on a Bill. It perhaps falsifies the claims from NZ First and lobby groups such as Family First New Zealand that this bill is a controversial one. It has, after all, essentially piggy-backed the debate on the Civil Union Bill of 2005. The first reading of the Marriage Equality Bill passed 80 votes to 40, and it is unlikely that the ayes will decrease at the second reading on Wednesday.

The representatives from each party had different reasons for supporting the bill. Shaun Wallis claimed that the Young Nats have been at the front urging MPs to support the issue from Day One, but have had a difficult task negotiating with their own MPs, given that half the party voted against the bill on first reading. Although Wallis said that this difficulty was partly due to the comparative size of the party, working within a historically queerphobic party is likely to skew the vote somewhat; National almost unanimously voted

against the legalisation of homosexuality in 1986. However, this level of youth consensus shows that attitudes to the queer community are slowly changing between generations. Although supporting the queer community is still a highly contentious issue in many areas, it seems largely regarded as fairly acceptable that they receive equal rights to civil institutions such as marriage. Whether or not the Young Nats' lobbying has convinced any of their MPs to change their position may become evident on Wednesday.

Although the issue is a conscience vote, the Greens and Mana Party support marriage equality based on party policies of equality for the rainbow community.

"The Mana movement supports equality for the poor and dispossessed; so for that reason, part of our takataapui or rainbow policy is marriage equality, and also an overhaul of adoption legislation," said Mana spokesperson Ian Anderson. Similar sentiments about family were also promoted by Teanu Mckenzie. "The Maori Party believe that whānau form a strong community, and we cannot see how excluding whānau members from being given the opportunity to marry if they so wish will build a harmonious and inclusive society," he said.

The NZ First representative Curwen Rolinson received much of the spotlight from the press gallery. NZ First has thus far voted unanimously against the Bill. Curiously, Rolinson said the main

problem the party had with the Bill was how it had been enacted, and called for a referendum. "Progressive social change is important, but must be exercised by the will of the people... rather than necessarily being filtered through layers of temporarily empowered politicians or the strictures of party politics," said Rolinson. However, he later said that "[NZ First Youth] can't ask our MPs to support something that doesn't include a referendum." He added that NZ First do not do conscience voting but, like the Greens and Mana, are guided by party policy. It is, then, unclear how NZ First supporters of marriage equality have strategised to negotiate with their MPs.

The brevity of the conference unfortunately prevented an in-depth conversation about the particularities of the Bill itself and its significance for the queer community. The fragmented nature of news broadcasting can make it difficult to analyse how queer activism plays out, how queerphobia varies between MPs on particular issues, and which political issues receive priority in the halls of Parliament. However, it is clear that the likely passage of this Bill will represent a victory for the queer community, even though not each individual member will necessarily benefit from it.

The conference ended with each youth representative signing a Marriage Equality Certificate.





Tariq Ali: Hugo Chávez and me

This obituary for Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez, by Tariq Ali, was originally printed in UK paper The Guardian.

Once I asked whether he preferred enemies who hated him because they knew what he was doing or those who frothed and foamed out of ignorance. He laughed. The former was preferable, he explained, because they made him feel that he was on the right track. Hugo Chávez's death did not come as a surprise, but that does not make it easier to accept. We have lost one of the political giants of the post-communist era. Venezuela, its elites mired in corruption on a huge scale, had been considered a secure outpost of Washington and, at the other extreme, the Socialist International. Few thought of the country before his victories. After 1999, every major media outlet of the west felt obliged to send a correspondent. Since they all said the same thing (the country was supposedly on the verge of a communist-style dictatorship) they would have been better advised to pool their resources.

I first met him in 2002, soon after the military coup instigated by Washington and Madrid had failed and subsequently on numerous occasions. He had asked to see me during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He inquired: "Why haven't you been to Venezuela? Come soon." I did. What appealed was his bluntness and courage. What often appeared as sheer impulsiveness had been carefully thought out and then, depending on the response, enlarged by spontaneous eruptions on his part. At a time when the world had fallen silent, when centre-left and centre-right had to struggle hard to find some differences and their politicians had become desiccated machine men obsessed with making money, Chávez lit up the political landscape.

He appeared as an indestructible ox, speaking for hours to his people in a warm, sonorous voice, a fiery eloquence that made it impossible to remain indifferent. His words had a stunning resonance. His speeches were littered with homilies, continental and national

history, quotes from the 19th-century revolutionary leader and president of Venezuela Simón Bolívar, pronouncements on the state of the world and songs. "Our bourgeoisie are embarrassed that I sing in public. Do you mind?" he would ask the audience. The response was a resounding "No". He would then ask them to join in the singing and mutter, "Louder, so they can hear us in the eastern part of the city." Once before just such a rally he looked at me and said: "You look tired today. Will you last out the evening?" I replied: "It depends on how long you're going to speak." It would be a short speech, he promised. Under three hours.

The Bolívarians, as Chávez's supporters were known, offered a political programme that challenged the Washington consensus: neo-liberalism at home and wars abroad. This was the prime reason for the vilification of Chávez that is sure to continue long after his death. Politicians like him had become unacceptable. What he loathed most was the contemptuous indifference of main-

Hugo Chavez

stream politicians in South America towards their own people. The Venezuelan elite is notoriously racist. They regarded the elected president of their country as uncouth and uncivilised, a zambo of mixed African and indigenous blood who could not be trusted. His supporters were portrayed on private TV networks as monkeys. Colin Powell had to publicly reprimand the US embassy in Caracas for hosting a party where Chávez was portrayed as a gorilla.

Was he surprised? “No,” he told me with a grim look on his face. “I live here. I know them well. One reason so many of us join the army is because all other avenues are sealed.” No longer. He had few illusions. He knew that local enemies did not seethe and plot in a vacuum. Behind them was the world’s most powerful state. For a few moments he thought Obama might be different. The military coup in Honduras disabused him of all such notions.

He had a punctilious sense of duty to his people. He was one of them. Unlike European social democrats he never believed that any improvement in humankind would come from the corporations and the bankers and said so long before the Wall Street crash of 2008. If I had to pin a label on him, I would say that he was a socialist democrat, far removed from any sectarian impulses and repulsed by the self-obsessed behaviour of various far-left sects and the blindness of their routines. He said as much when we first met.

The following year in Caracas I questioned him further on the Bolivarian project. What could be accomplished? He was very clear; much more so than some of his over-enthusiastic supporters: “I don’t believe in the dogmatic postulates of Marxist revolution. I don’t accept that we are living in a period of proletarian revolutions. All that must be revised. Reality is telling us that every day. Are we aiming in Venezuela today for the abolition of private property or a classless society? I don’t think so. But if I’m told that because of that reality you

can’t do anything to help the poor, the people who have made this country rich through their labour – and never forget that some of it was slave labour – then I say: ‘We part company.’ I will never accept that there can be no redistribution of wealth in society. Our upper classes don’t even like paying taxes. That’s one reason they hate me. We said: ‘You must pay your taxes.’ I believe it’s better to

worried that perhaps she had not brought him up as well as she should have done: “We always made sure that he read books as a child.” This passion for reading stayed with him. History, fiction and poetry were the loves of his life: “Like me, Fidel is an insomniac. Sometimes we’re reading the same novel. He rings at 3am and asks: ‘Well, have you finished? What did you think?’



Can the progressive changes brought about under Chavez continue with his death?

die in battle, rather than hold aloft a very revolutionary and very pure banner, and do nothing ... That position often strikes me as very convenient, a good excuse ... Try and make your revolution, go into combat, advance a little, even if it’s only a millimetre, in the right direction, instead of dreaming about utopias.”

I remember sitting next to an elderly, modestly attired woman at one of his public rallies. She questioned me about him. What did I think? Was he doing well? Did he not speak too much? Was he not too rash at times? I defended him. She was relieved. It was his mother,

And we argue for another hour.”

It was the spell of literature that in 2005 led him to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Cervantes’s great novel in a unique fashion. The ministry of culture reprinted a million copies of *Don Quixote* and distributed them free to a million poor, but now literate, households. A quixotic gesture? No. The magic of art can’t transform the universe, but it can open up a mind. Chávez was confident that the book would be read now or later.

The closeness to Castro has been portrayed as a father-son relationship.

This is only partially the case. Last year a huge crowd had gathered outside the hospital in Caracas, where Chávez was meant to be recuperating from cancer treatment, and their chants got louder and louder. Chávez ordered a loudspeaker system on the rooftop. He then addressed the crowd. Watching this scene on Telesur in Havana, Castro was shocked. He rang the director of



the hospital: “This is Fidel Castro. You should be sacked. Get him back into bed and tell him I said so.”

Above the friendship, Chávez saw Castro and Che Guevara in a historical frame. They were the 20th-century heirs of Bolívar and his friend Antonio José de Sucre. They tried to unite the continent, but it was like ploughing the sea. Chávez got closer to that ideal than the quartet he admired so much. His successes in Venezuela triggered a continental reaction: Bolivia and Ecuador saw victories. Brazil under Lula and Dilma did not follow the social model

but refused to allow the west to pit them against each other. It was a favoured trope of western journalists: Lula is better than Chávez. Only last year Lula publicly declared that he supported Chávez, whose importance for “our continent” should never be underestimated. The image of Chávez most popular in the west was that of an oppressive-caudillo. Had this been true I would wish for more of them. The Bolivarian constitution, opposed by the Venezuelan opposition, its newspapers and TV channels and the local CNN, plus western supporters, was approved by a large majority of the population. It is the only constitution in the world that affords the possibility of removing an elected president from office via a referendum based on collecting sufficient signatures. Consistent only in their hatred for Chávez, the opposition tried to use this mechanism in 2004 to remove him. Regardless of the fact that many of the signatures were those of dead people, the Venezuelan government decided to accept the challenge.

I was in Caracas a week before the vote. When I met Chávez at the Miraflores palace he was poring over the opinion polls in great detail. It might be close. “And if you lose?” I asked. “Then I will resign,” he replied without hesitation. He won.

Did he ever tire? Get depressed? Lose confidence? “Yes,” he replied. But it was not the coup attempt or the referendum. It was the strike organised by the corrupted oil unions and backed by the middle-classes that worried him because it would affect the entire population, especially the poor: “Two factors helped sustain my morale. The first was the support we retained throughout the country. I got fed up sitting in my office. So with one security guard and two comrades I drove out to listen to people and breathe better air. The response moved me greatly. A woman came up to me and said: ‘Chávez follow me, I want to show you something.’ I followed her into her tiny dwelling. Inside, her

husband and children were waiting for the soup to be cooked. ‘Look at what I’m using for fuel ... the back of our bed. Tomorrow I’ll burn the legs, the day after the table, then the chairs and doors. We will survive, but don’t give up now.’ On my way out the kids from the gangs came and shook hands. ‘We can live without beer. You make sure you screw these motherfuckers.’”

What was the inner reality of his life? For anyone with a certain level of intelligence, of character and culture, his or her natural leanings, emotional and intellectual, hang together, constitute a whole not always visible to everyone. He was a divorcee, but affection for his children and grandchildren was never in doubt. Most of the women he loved, and there were a few, described him as a generous lover, and this was long after they had parted.

What of the country he leaves behind? A paradise? Certainly not. How could it be, given the scale of the problems? But he leaves behind a very changed society in which the poor felt they had an important stake in the government. There is no other explanation for his popularity. Venezuela is divided between his partisans and detractors. He died undefeated, but the big tests lie ahead. The system he created, a social democracy based on mass mobilisations, needs to progress further. Will his successors be up to the task? In a sense, that is the ultimate test of the Bolivarian experiment.

Of one thing we can be sure. His enemies will not let him rest in peace. And his supporters? His supporters, the poor throughout the continent and elsewhere, will see him as a political leader who promised and delivered social rights against heavy odds; as someone who fought for them and won.

Film review: No

by Byron Clark

After touring a number of film festivals and picking up the Art Cinema award at Cannes, Chilean director Pablo Larraín's film *No* has arrived in New Zealand for a limited theatrical release. This is Larraín's second film looking at Chile's tumultuous political history; 2010's *Post Mortem* was set during the 1973 military coup that overthrew leftist President Salvador Allende, inaugurating the 17-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. *No* is set in 1988 and takes place during the historic referendum on whether or not Pinochet should have another 8-year term as President.

While the film is certainly one to see for fans for Latin American cinema or anyone with an interest in Chile's history, it also provides some ideas for those active in political campaigns today.

Gael García Bernal (star of 2004's *The Motorcycle Diaries*) plays René, an advertising agent who is shown at the beginning of the film pitching a soft drink commercial when he is approached by an old acquaintance requesting his help on the 'No' campaign.

When international pressure forced the Pinochet regime to hold the referendum, each side was given 15 minutes of advertising in the middle of the night over a 27 day period. The group of left-wing parties involved in the No campaign initially wanted to show the horrors of the regime on screen; torture, disappearances and restrictions on dissent. René, in contrast, wanted to present an optimistic view of a post-Pinochet Chile, which appears to have more in common with his soda and microwave commercials than the opposition's suggestions.

While the conflict between these ideas

makes for one of the best dramatic scenes in the film, the final TV spots that René and his team come up with represent the best of both worlds, not dumbing down the politics of the situation, but presenting them in a way that is catching and memorable. For example, when a jingle writer asks René why he isn't finding a rock or folk singer to write an anthem for the No campaign he replies that he isn't looking for an

probably not persuaded by advertising. The thing is, everyone thinks that, and advertising is a \$600 billion industry. Someone, somewhere is getting \$600 billion worth of persuasion. "

Locally, Unite Union recognised the impact that marketing had in their 2005-2006 "SupersizeMyPay" campaign. It adopted a striking red and yellow colour scheme for all campaign materials and borrowed the McDonalds

created phrase 'Super Size'. The campaign co-opted as much as it subverted the fast food industry's own marketing. While of course the biggest impact came from a supersized organising effort and industrial action, visibility and public awareness of the campaign was increased by the way it was branded.

No deserves the critical acclaim it has received. The danger of working on a dissenting campaign under an authoritarian regime is shown through the intimidation René and his colleagues find themselves in. It is also shown in the conflict between René and his boss, who has been enlisted to work on the 'Yes' campaign. A subplot about the relationship between René and his ex-wife gives the character depth, though this subplot is

unresolved by the end of the movie.

Larraín made the interesting decision to shoot the movie on U-Matic magnetic tape, a format widely used for news broadcasts in Chile (as elsewhere) in the 1980s, rather than shooting on film or a modern digital format. This means that archival footage blends seamlessly with the fictionalised narrative and adds to the realism of the film. Of course since *No* is deliberately low-definition you won't be missing out on much if you forgo the cinema screenings and watch it on DVD. Whichever way you see it though, just make sure you do.



anthem, he is looking for a jingle.

One of the key themes of the film is the question of how to communicate political ideas. While most advertising is indeed terrible from a creative standpoint, the nature of capitalism means that it is the industry where many creative types will end up working and the skills of those people shouldn't be written off wholesale. Cynical leftist attitudes toward advertising, such as those presented in the Canadian magazine *Adbusters*, fail to acknowledge its persuasive power. To quote Australian author (and former marketing guy) Max Barry "You're